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THE REOPENING OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM.

THE Metropolitan Museum is again open to the public. The chief attraction of the new season is found to be the altar-piece ascribed to Luca della Robbia, of which we have already published a description; and up to the time of the present writing, this example of the art of the great Florentine's school draws hundreds of visitors who, in its absence, would be obliged to content themselves with the same things that were in the museum before it was closed, less the larger part of the pictures in the loan collection.

There is, on first entering, a look of novelty in the collections of the first floor, barring always the Cypriote objects, which are too well placed already to make any change in their arrangement desirable; but on a closer examination it will be found that this novelty is an appearance only, resulting from the fact that there has been a general change-about of the cases, and that a good many of them have been removed to the basement, the sunny, southern side of which is now transformed into a large, well-lighted and comfortable room. Here are placed the casts of Egyptian sculptures, a small but interesting and valuable collection, the gift of Mr. Drexel, and the casts of architectural details and of sculpture of the Greek, Mediæval and Renaissance periods presented by Mr. R. M. Hunt. There is no proper place for the exhibition of these casts, which are hung for the present on the south wall of the room, where, with the exception of a few that are placed on the sides of the piers, they receive no direct light and miss of their effect. This is a pity, because the casts are of some value, and if well placed would be useful to students. Mr. Hunt's gift makes a foundation for such a collection of architectural casts as ought to be owned by a museum, and it is to be hoped that other liberal-minded friends of the institution will continue the work he has so well begun. It may be, and probably will be, many years before we have here in New York such a collection of casts as the English have at South Kensington, but there is no reason why we should not begin with as good a collection as they have in Boston in the Art Museum there. We have the man here, now resident among us, who was the most active and alert instrument in gathering together the rich Boston array of architectural casts, and we wish his industrious and learned hands might find work to do here of the same kind.

In cases lining one side of the basement are objects manufactured by the aborigines of this continent, and in cases in the middle of the room a complete collection of the fictile ivories (casts imitating in texture and color the original ivories) published by the Arundel Society. These objects are all easily seen and enjoyed, with the exception of the drawback of ineffective lighting we have mentioned in the case of the Hunt casts—the Egyptian casts are thoroughly well placed—and a pleasant and instructive hour, many hours, in fact, may be passed in this part of the building.

It is hard to say it, but it certainly seems to be true, that there is much less to be learned and enjoyed on the main floor of the building where, of course, one would expect to find the best things, than is to be learned and enjoyed either in the galleries or in the basement. Our opinion is well known as to the present value of the Cesnola collection, and we have no wish to speak of it at present. Brief mention too will suffice for the statuary, which we never see without mortification. Our only solace in looking at the ridiculous new statue "The Thief," by an Italian hand, is that it shows our own sculptors have not touched bottom as one might fear in looking at such of their works as are collected here. With the Scotch abortion, the statue of Robert Burns, in the Park, outside—how can any Scotchman see without indignation his country's greatest man of genius so insulted!—and with this other statue from the land of Michael Angelo within the museum, we can look with better patience upon the forcible feebleness of Mr. Story, and the platitudes of the late Mr. Powers. Nevertheless, most heartily do we wish that the owners of these unfortunate marbles would kindly take them home.

To turn to something pleasanter—the Charvet collection of Roman glass will always be found worth studying, and no matter what additions may be made to it in the future, it will hold its place, and more, for it must increase in value as specimens of this antique art are more and more absorbed by public museums. As

for the Venetian glass presented by Mr. Jarvis, we have only to say that it is not worthy a place in any public museum—think of finding in South Kensington some of these pieces, the large mirror for instance, lying on its back in one of the cases—and that it is quite worthy of the companionship of the collection of drawings by the old masters which discredit us upstairs. In fact, it is a simple, easily demonstrated fact, that if all were taken out of the museum that has no right whatever to a place in it, there would be no reason whatever in the demand we hear for an addition to the present building. There is room enough here and to spare for all that the museum possesses of real value.

The King collection of gems is another valuable possession, but it is not properly arranged. It can neither be studied, nor can the colors of the gems be enjoyed so long as they are laid upon the opaque ground of velvet on which they are at present placed. Castellani showed us the way to exhibit gems when he placed those belonging to his collection in an upright screen of dark velvet, into which the gems were set so that we looked through them as through so many little windows, and could enjoy at once both the design and the color. It is a pity that the museum collection should not have the advantage of a sensible arrangement; we lose much enjoyment by the present mode of showing it.

The legacy of the late Mr. Phoenix, so much talked of, proves greatly disappointing, as those who knew the objects before they were shown to the public, said would be the case. Compared with even the small collection of Japanese objects in the gallery upstairs belonging to Mr. R. E. Moore, the things presented by Mr. Phoenix will be found of inferior beauty and of far less artistic value; they belong to the showy and vulgar side of Japanese handicraft. No doubt, they represent a good deal of money, but that is less a criterion in Oriental art, even to-day, than in some other matters. Apart from the Oriental objects left to the museum by Mr. Phoenix, the collection is a heterogeneous and commonplace one; it even includes some copies of mediæval objects and very poor copies too, in galvanoplasty. This collection ought to be thoroughly sifted out, and for the credit not only of the museum itself, but of the donor whose intentions were, no doubt, most liberal, only those objects should be retained which a museum of the pretensions of ours can, with propriety, exhibit to the public.

Upstairs there is but little change at the eastern end of the building or in the side galleries, where the Blodgett pictures and the Vanderbilt "drawings" still occupy the larger part of the space. The large painting attributed to Rubens, "The Return of Mary, Joseph, and the Child, from Egypt," has at last been transferred from the panel on which it was originally painted to canvas, and has survived the very skilfully performed operation. But certainly the painting is not worth the money and time it has cost. It is nothing in itself, and even if it be accepted as a work of Rubens, we must remember that the Flemish Jupiter sometimes nodded as well as the Greek one; and this picture is by no means one of his wide-awake ones. However, it is late in the day, to be questioning the value of the "pictures chiefly by old masters" in the museum.

Among the old pictures lent to the museum, Mr. Kellogg's so-called "Leonardo" easily holds the first place for its intrinsic beauty. On this score at all events it deserves a post of honor on these walls. If we might advise the trustees, we would suggest that the utterly absurd picture bearing a tablet on which Raphael's name is conspicuously written, should be removed from the gallery before the new painting, the "Madonna dei Candellabri," is exhibited to the public. Even without any name such a picture is a discredit to any wall it may hang upon, but nothing can be more ignorant than the putting Raphael's name to such a performance.

The loan collection of pictures amounts to little or nothing this year. It is always hard to collect pictures from our rich amateurs for a winter exhibition, since naturally they want their possessions to adorn their own houses, but whether the supply of pictures never yet loaned is exhausted, or for whatever reason, it has been found unusually difficult this year to collect good pictures, and in consequence, one of the rooms, the extreme western one is nearly empty, the space above a single line of pictures being filled up temporarily with some very commonplace tapestries. There are, however, some good pictures among those that have been lent; but among these good ones we cannot count the "Honorius" of the French painter, J. P. Laurens,

much talked of as it was when exhibited in the Paris Salon a year or two ago. How many a picture, the talk of a season, would be less enthusiastically judged if seen a few years later, and three thousand miles or so away from the place where it was painted!

Our visit to the museum at the present time suggests to us the remark that the great size of the building and the necessity the trustees seem to feel themselves under to fill it, no matter with what, is after all a great detriment to the museum and an injury to the public. Good, bad, and indifferent things are here packed in together and shown to the public as if of equal value. Persons whose studies and opportunities have educated them to discriminate may not be hurt by this confusion, but the mass of the public is seriously hurt, and anyway we are discredited abroad. Our museum cuts a pitiful figure even when compared with those of Boston and Washington; what then must strangers think of it who come to it fresh from the Louvre and from London? Now this discrediting would not be possible if the trustees would set their faces resolutely against accepting anything as a gift or on loan that is not first-rate of its kind. Then, even though the Museum were small, confined only to a few rooms, it would be respectable and its future would look bright. It would be an honor to have one's gifts or loan accepted by an institution which showed itself jealous of its character. But our museum is at once too presuming and too easy-going.

My Note Book.



THE Salmagundi Sketch Club perhaps has never had a better exhibition than that now open at the National Academy of Design. This is equal to saying that probably nowhere has there been a better exhibition of the kind, which is not extravagant praise; for such a collection of new works in black-and-white is almost an American specialty. Similar exhibitions, it is true, are held in London periodically; but they do not com-

pare in interest with ours; for they are made up almost entirely of the originals of pictures which have been published in the London illustrated journals. The Salmagundi shows fewer of such drawings than at any previous exhibition. There is indeed no need of padding. What few there are of this kind are decidedly interesting—the original drawings, for example, of the splendid wood-engravings in Harper's "Christmas," a few of those in Osgood's holiday book, "The Lady of the Lake," a little collection of F. O. C. Darley's beautiful wash drawings, and four of Du Maurier's wonderful pen-and-inks well known to us all through Punch. These latter are worth careful study. The artist draws on rough white paper with apparently an ordinary pen, and gives the engraver every line that is to appear in the woodcut. If the actinic processes were as good in England as they are in this country there would be no need for an engraver to touch a drawing so perfectly adapted for photographic reproduction.

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THE name "Monochrome" exhibition gives a truer idea of the character of the pictures and sketches shown at the Academy building than the term "black-and-white." Really, only a small proportion comes strictly under the latter category. The term monochrome as used in its more elastic sense, would include Blashfield's capital sketch in oils of the unhappy little girl at her music lesson; J. A. S. Monks' vigorous sheep and goats, in curiously combined mediums; Smedley's oil study of an old farmer surveying his broken fence; Mrs. Odenheimer Fowler's pretty faces, in red oils (called somewhat arbitrarily, "Astra," "Amphitrite," etc.), Sarony's charcoal sketches on tinted grounds; Nehlig's and Shelton's wash drawings; Bicknell's monotypes—indeed everything in the exhibition.